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~ Quicker Browsing Tips! ~ People Are Talking! ~ School HP Disaster!
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~ Dot London Is Coming! ~ Super Wi-Fi on Campus! ~ Skyscraper Pong!

~ PS4 Blue Light of Death ~ Brits Trim Addresses! ~ Are We Ready for 3D?

-* 'Just Kidding' Doesn't Work! *-
-* Software Patent Reform Dies in House *-
-* Microsoft Kills Employee Ranking System! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"  
"~~~~~"

I was 12-years-old, sitting in Freddie Harlow's 7th grade American History class when we were interrupted by an announcement over the school's PA system. In a shaky voice, we learned that President Kennedy had been shot.

It's hard to imagine that day was 50 years ago, today. I remember walking home, in a daze. The family spent most of the rest of the day in front of the television set, trying to understand what had happened, and what was going on in the aftermath. It's likely that all of America, and most of the world, was watching and listening to these current events.

We were all glued to the television set, even during meals, for the next few days. It was just something that we had to do. Even today, 50 years later, it seems appropriate to mention this fateful anniversary and commemorate the legacy of JFK.

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony PlayStation 4's 'Blue Light of Death'!
"~~~~~" The Last Word on...the Xbox One!
Why We Still Need Consoles!
And much, much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!  
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An Xbox One Review, From The Worst Video Game Player on the Internet

Of all the writers reviewing the Xbox One, I am undoubtedly the worst at video games. In high school, my friends invited me over to play only when they needed a round number of participants; most of my recent gaming experiences have ended with me getting punted off a floating island after inflicting zero damage on my competitors, or else getting karate chopped to death by Oddjob, despite possessing the so-called Golden Gun.

In single-player mode, my relationship with any video game is the same as my relationship with "Gravity's Rainbow": I have never "finished" either, only gotten far enough in that I consider my experience complete and satisfactory.

Given this utter lack of gaming cred, it was kind of Microsoft to give me an early chance to try its new Xbox One, which on Friday will go on sale as the company's first new game console since the Xbox 360 in 2005. I imagine I made the cut because, as Microsoft promised me, the Xbox One is less about video games than any previous video game console. Microsoft is pitching the Xbox One as a home entertainment system rather than a gamer's dream machine. It's an all-in-one media center that integrates video games, the Internet, your cable box and several streaming media subscriptions in one.

Even if you never figured out how to throw a forward pass in "Madden" or ever managed to shoot anyone at all in "Halo," there is supposed to be something here for you.

And lo! There is. Microsoft has built the most comprehensive, capable and roundly satisfying media box that you have ever plugged into your television. The Xbox One is easy to use and integrates all the services you would want into one place, in a way that no other device specifically designed for the TV has.

That's a feat: The Xbox One is, simply, the new gold standard for black boxes. But though the Xbox One is the most impressive media center I've tried, it's still too expensive for anyone who doesn't also want to mash buttons. You better love playing video games, whether you're great or you stink, if you're going to plunk down \$500 plus a \$60 annual subscription for its best features for this thing, as opposed to, say, \$100 for a Roku or Apple TV.

Like those devices, the Xbox One connects to the Internet via Wi-Fi or Ethernet cable and lets you play certain streaming services on your television. Polished, speedy apps for Netflix, Hulu Plus, Amazon Video, ESPN and the NFL have all hit the Xbox marketplace; apps for the NBA, MLB and HBO are on their way. There's also an Xbox storefront to download or stream movies and individual episodes of television shows, just as you would from iTunes or from a VOD service like Vudu.

Microsoft has the basics covered, in other words; but if you're going to pitch yourself as the ultimate entertainment machine, you have to go beyond the bones and add some meat. Xbox One's most impressive feature is its television integration: You can plug your cable box into the back of the Xbox, rather than into the television itself; after a two-minute setup, you can watch all your cable channels through the console, with a customized on-screen guide and everything.

Even better, you can just call out the channel you want Xbox, watch Bravo! rather than page through endless lists of shows you don't care about. You can also control the volume and turn the TV on and off using your voice, and you never have to change inputs to go from, say, cable to

Netflix to video games to the Internet Explorer browser.

This is how the modern television should work, and delightfully, it does work, mostly, on the Xbox One.

Neat tricks abound, but they don't accumulate to \$460 of value above the \$100 you would spend on a Roku or Apple TV, alas. The Xbox One costs \$500 to start, plus \$60 a year for access to streaming apps. For that much money, I'd rather deal with finding my remote control and occasionally pressing the input button.

If you've got the money, no one has brought the various services you'd want on your big screen into a single-input package like Microsoft has. If you don't have the money, the Roku 3 and Google's Chromecast both cost less than a month of premium cable and will certainly be in stock, and in stockings, this holiday season.

As for the games: As many of my esteemed, nimble-fingered colleagues have noted, the lineup is somewhat thin at launch. Obviously this won't be the case for long, and the selection will improve rapidly. This is why so many tech critics urge potential Xbox One and PlayStation 4 buyers to wait a year or so, for the great games and killer apps to land.

Of course, this is a boring way to live your life. So what are you getting on Xbox One, Day One?

The best game, by far, is "Ryse," in which you play a superhandsome Roman soldier tasked with killing barbarians in the most gruesome, gory way possible. Basically, you run around Rome, chopping off ruffians' heads with your sword. It's a lot of fun, and the graphics are stupendous and smooth.

I also enjoyed "LocoCycle," a simple adventure game in which you are a motorcycle trying to destroy other motorcycles and enemy cars by smashing buttons on your controller as hard as you can. The game gets a little repetitive after a few hours, but it's solid, uncomplicated entertainment.

Elsewhere, there's "Forza Motorsport," a racing game more concerned with lifelike graphics than fun; two races in, and "Forza" had me yearning for the cartoonish glee of "Mario Kart." "Killer Instinct" and "Crimson Dragon" similarly fizzle. I didn't play "Dead Rising 3," a zombie game that got decent, though not ebullient, reviews. While we're confessing our sins, I also haven't yet checked out the \$400 PlayStation 4, which ships with fewer media features and what my colleagues assure me is a less impressive slate of games.

For both the PS4, and the Xbox One, better games appear to be on the horizon; for now, your best Xbox option is the one where you stomp a bunch of Visigoths to death with your sandaled Roman foot. It's so simple, even I was able to thoughtlessly murder 800 savages.

Do I enjoy my Xbox One? You bet. It's a leap past any other streaming media box I've used, and the voice controls for the television will make you wonder why you're buying AA batteries for your finicky remote every month. Still, at \$560 for the full media center experience, you're probably better off with one of the cheaper streaming boxes and a finger planted firmly on your Switch Input button.

And as for the gamers—well, you'll probably love it, once the games that take advantage of the One's processing power start to debut.

So get practicing: You've got hapless friends to humiliate. Anyone need a fourth?

### Sony PlayStation 4's 'Blue Light of Death' Haunting Some Customers

The PlayStation 4 may have sold more than 1 million units in its first day alone, but not all of them are happy customers. Many consoles have experienced what's being called the "Blue Light of Death," a situation where the PS4 doesn't output any signal to the TV while its power indicator displays pulsating blue light.

All PS4 consoles display the blue light when the PS4 turns on, but it eventually transitions to white when the system is fully functional. Consoles afflicted with the Blue Light of Death never get past the blue light, turning the system into a \$400 paperweight. A troubleshooting guide on The PS4 forums says it could be issues relating to the system's power supply and hard drive, as well as incompatibility issues with certain televisions. "We appreciate your patience while we investigate," wrote the post's author, a Sony employee.

But patience seems to be running thin for some customers. The PS4's customer reviews page on Amazon is filled with one-star reviews, many citing the Blue Light of Death as the main reason for the negative review.

"The number of affected PS4 systems is less than 1 percent, which represents a very small percentage of total units shipped to date and is within the expected range for a new product introduction," said Sony in a statement. However, they are helping those who have been affected by the Blue Light of Death. "We understand the frustration of consumers that have had a problem and are working with them and our retail partners to help troubleshoot issues and ensure affected units are exchanged."

"We understand the frustration of consumers that have had a problem and are working with them and our retail partners to help troubleshoot issues and ensure affected units are exchanged," said Sony in a statement.

ABC News' first review unit of the PS4 also experienced the Blue Light of Death and was quickly replaced. The new PS4 has not experienced any hardware problems.

The PS4 isn't the only video game console suffering from dead-on-arrival issues. Microsoft's Xbox 360 had a similar problem with a similar name: the Red Ring of Death. The Xbox 360's problems were significant enough to extend the console's warranty to three years, costing the company more than \$1 billion.

### The Last Word on...the Xbox One

2013 should be the best holiday shopping game console slobberknocker in years. Sony had its big PlayStation 4 launch last week, and now this Friday is the Xbox One's big day. With each console launching well over a month before the end of gift-getting (and gift-giving) season, we're sure

to be in for the type of craze that will make the whole Tickle Me Elmo thing look like a blip on the map.

But which console should you put under your tree (or, if you have huge feet, shove in your stocking)? In an effort to help pick which console to get that special someone and/or yourself this holiday, we've compiled the best chunks of the reviews for the PlayStation 4 and now the Xbox One. Read on below if you're game.

We call it...the LAST WORD

Microsoft Xbox One

The Verge: The Xbox One's revolution nearly failed at the first hurdle. But now it has recovered with fervor and the revolution is underway, albeit imperfectly. Despite its occasionally choppy interface, its unremarkable design and its high price tag, Xbox One is changing the way gamers use their consoles.

With TV integration and a solid set of launch titles, the Xbox One has positioned itself at the very front of the console race. Let the battle commence!

Adam Shaw, Fox News

BGR ...After spending the last two weeks tinkering with the Xbox One, I can say that I was pleasantly surprised by just how much fun it was to play. There were a predictable number of technical pre-launch glitches that Microsoft assured me would be ironed out come launch day on Friday. But the Xbox One really is a compelling piece of hardware, complete with a strong lineup of launch games. And that's more than I could say for Sony's PlayStation 4, which arrived last Friday.

...How does it all add up? Like the legions of gamers that flocked to pick up the PlayStation 4 last week, I admired Sony's new console because of its incredible promise. Microsoft, on the other hand, has already begun to deliver on the promises it made with the Xbox One.

Yannick LeJacq, NBC News

The Verge: Today, the Xbox One is a great gaming console with a few great games. Zoo Tycoon and Forza are both excellent, better than anything currently available for the PS4, and Dead Rising is a blast even if it's flawed. Whether or not the Xbox is better than the PS4 is entirely subjective: if you're committed to buying a console this holiday season, buy the one with the games you want. It's too soon to make a call on almost any other feature. Don't buy an Xbox One expecting to immediately throw out your entertainment center.

The Xbox One is here for a decade. If Microsoft can deliver on all its promises in that time, it will have built a console truly worthy of Input One. But that's a big if.

The Verge

The Verge...in many ways, the Xbox One's bold direction for the future is well in place. The integration of voice controls and its media strategy are a boon to everyone, and the ability to run apps while playing games is something we now want on every gaming console we have. That it has a handful of strong, exclusive games at launch only supports its legitimacy as a gaming console and not just an entertainment hub.

The Xbox One is an impressive marriage of software and hardware that

raises the bar in terms of what we expect from a living-room machine. Looking forward more than it looks back, the Xbox One feels like it's from the future.

Polygon

The Verge: Would I recommend buying the Xbox One? If you already have a 360 and aren't absolutely dying for any of the launch titles, I would say hold off for now. Give developers a bit of time to figure out the console's inner workings. Let the must-have titles get made. If your 360 is on its last leg or you skipped the last generation, however, it's a solid buy as is.

Greg Kumparak, TechCrunch

The Verge: I admire what Microsoft is trying to do with the Xbox One, and I'm rooting for them to give their console that final push to get it to where it needs to be. The whole thing is almost there. The Kinect almost works well enough to get me to use it all the time. The TV integration is almost smooth enough to make me plug it into the heart of my living-room setup. Multitasking almost works well enough to get me checking the internet while I play games.

The skeptic in me says that while many technology manufacturers seem hell-bent on making the next great convergence device, technology tends to diverge. New devices are more likely to take on a role we didn't know we wanted (e.g. people now own a smartphone, a laptop and a tablet) instead of pulling together multiple roles we didn't realize could be combined. Successful convergence devices like the iPhone will forever inspire others to swim upstream, attempting to replicate a one-in-a-million success. Will our living rooms ever be governed by a single device? And if so, will that device be the Xbox One?

Kirk Hamilton, Kotaku

Engadget: The Xbox One may not be exactly what Microsoft thinks it is, but it's still a strong start for a powerful game console. Its sheer speed, versatility, horsepower and its ability to turn on and off with words make it a relatively seamless entry into our already crowded media center. What determines whether it stays there is the next 12 months: Exclusives like Titanfall and Quantum Break will help, as will gaining feature parity with the competition (we're looking at you, game broadcasting!). For broader success beyond just the early adopter's living room, the NFL crowd must buy in to Microsoft's \$500 box. But will they? That remains to be seen. What's there so far is a very competent game box with an expensive camera and only a few exclusive games differentiating it from the competition.

Ben Gilbert, Engadget

The Verge: In short, buy an Xbox One if and when there are enough exclusive games to convince you it's worth the expense. At that point, the extra media features that the Xbox One brings to the table will be nice fringe benefits, and these options may be more stable and usable than they are right now. If you can live without those platform exclusives, though, and if you can do without fancy picture-in-picture and voice commands, look into saving some money on a PlayStation 4 instead.

Kyle Orland, Ars Technica

The Verge: [Should you buy the Xbox One?] Not yet. It's generally dumb to buy any new console right at launch. PS4's have been having issues with a "blue light of death," and for all we know the Xbox One could have its

own issues as well; the sting of the red ring of death is still fresh in most memories. Besides, the launch line-up of games while a little better than the PS4's is a bit soft. The real gotta-play system-sellers like Watchdogs, Destiny, and Titanfall, are still a few months out. Halo 5 is a mere glint on the horizon.

...For now, the Xbox One is one impressive living room box machine and it more than justifies its \$500 dollar price with the inclusion of at least \$100-worth of set-top boxitude but you're going to be better off waiting for a little while to see how things shake out.

But and this is admittedly a sizable but if the Xbox One can straighten the few little quirks it has with some software tweaks, this thing is going to be unstoppable in a way the PS4 could never touch. It's too versatile, too feature-ridden, too future. So wait, yes. But while you do, go ahead and start clearing out plenty of space underneath your television.

Eric Limer, Gizmodo

BGRSo the Xbox One is a powerful machine with lots of intriguing ideas and improvements. But is it worth the \$500 sticker price, not to mention the \$60 per year for an Xbox Live Gold membership?

It really depends on your current needs. If their old consoles haven't gotten too much mileage, Xbox 360 owners may hold off for a bit and feast on the system's hearty back catalog and new games, none of which will be backwards-compatible with the One.

For home entertainment purposes, those with a more complex setup may want to research how the One could integrate with their needs. For families with a TV and a love of streaming content, the One's customizable profiles that let you pick and choose your favorite channels and apps will be useful.

Although the One has its flaws, it's important to remember where the Xbox 360 was when it started, and how far it's come. Microsoft will surely get feedback from owners and mold the One into a more perfect version of an all-in-one entertainment system. What they've got now is a nice foundation.

Drew Guarini, Huffington Post

## Why The Gaming World Still Needs Consoles

With both the Xbox One and the PlayStation 4 now out in the United States, there's been some chatter about whether they'll lead to a broader revival in the gaming market or whether they'll be seen as the console era's last hurrah as more casual gamers get their fix through mobile devices while the remaining hardcore gamers hunker down in their PC bunkers. As someone who has enjoyed video games ever since getting his first 8-bit Nintendo console back in 1988, I really hope that dedicated gaming consoles stay as centerpieces of the gaming world because they provide something that neither tablets nor PCs can really achieve.

On the tablet side of things, the advantage that consoles have is obvious: They flat-out produce better games. Yes, millions of people love Angry Birds, Candy Crush Saga and other mobile app marvels but they're not what I'm looking for in a game. I love games that are big,



challenging and immersive with a lot of different things to do.

Grand Theft Auto V, Bioshock Infinite and The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim are all terrifically ambitious games that required killer hardware to work. While some tablet games such as the Infinity Blade series really do have impressive graphics for tablets, they ll never be on the bleeding edge as the triple-A titles mentioned above will be consoles simply offer more juice than what tablets are able to match.

Things get a little trickier when comparing consoles with PCs. By all accounts and especially the accounts of PC gamers gaming on your PC is a richer, better experience than gaming on consoles. Because PCs come out much more frequently than consoles, they often surpass consoles hardware capabilities and deliver higher frame rates and sharper graphics. Plus, PCs offer a lot more flexibility and allow for modifications that make already-great games even better. Just look at what a heavily modded version of Skyrim looks like compared with the vanilla console version and you ll understand why this can be important.

But there s something nice about buying a game for a console and knowing that it will, to use a favorite Steve Jobs expression, just work. Game developers have often complained about how consoles hardware specifications have limited them somewhat and have forced them to waste time figuring out ways to make their bold designs fit into consoles imposed restrictions. But from my perspective this is a good thing: After all, there s nothing more frustrating than buying a \$60 game and having it not work right out of the box because your drivers aren t fully updated.

Oh sure, you could buy a future proof gaming PC but those are tremendously expensive. I would much rather lay down a mere \$400 to pick up a console where I can pop in a game and know that it will run exactly as it s supposed to right away without futzing around with driver updates or graphics cards.

So here s hoping that the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 are smashing successes. Because if the gaming market fractures to the point where our only two options for games are playing Candy Crush on an iPad or Skyrim on a \$1,200 gaming PC, then it will be a sad day indeed.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -          Online Users Growl & Purr!
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## Pong' Played on Philly Skyscraper Earns Record

A college professor who played a supersized video game on the side of a Philadelphia skyscraper now holds a Guinness record for the feat.

Drexel University professor Frank Lee re-created the classic Atari video game "Pong" on the 29-story Cira Centre last spring.

The building essentially became a 60,000-square-foot "screen" as hundreds of embedded LED lights replicated the familiar ball and paddles. They were controlled by a joystick about a mile away.

Drexel officials learned on Friday that the project earned Lee the Guinness World Record for "largest architectural video game display."

Other gaming enthusiasts got to share in the fun in April. Players also tried out giant versions of "Space Invaders" and "Tetris."

### World's Best Donkey Kong Players Duke It Out at Kong Off 3

Right now, 22 of the world's best are dodging barrels, grabbing hammers, and hoping to save the princess all in the name of a high score and potential world record.

The third annual Kong Off ("Kong Off 3") is currently taking place at Denver's The 1Up arcade. Partially inspired by the King of Kong documentary, this competition invites the top Donkey Kong players from the official Twin Galaxies world rankings to face off with other highly qualified gamers and enthusiasts. Twin Galaxies owner Jourdan Adler told The Denver Post he expects 2,200 people to be in attendance.

This year all of the competitive Kong scene's best are there. Both Steve Wiebe and Billy Mitchell the main duo highlighted in the The King of Kong are participating, as is current world record holder Hank Chien. But the end is near, and it's Jeff Willms who currently has the event's high score: 1,096,200. That finish would be good enough for fifth-best in the World Record rankings.

Willms is the event's defending champion, winning the Kong Off 2 with a score of 1,105,400 good enough for fourth in the World Record standings. What's more impressive than his total, however, is the fact that Willms isn't even a Kong competitor by trade. The official event history describes him as a professional chess player who "rarely played the arcade version. Instead, he learned his skills on a Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator (MAME), a computer program that generates an emulation of various arcade games."

"Last quarter" begins at 6pm local time, with the competition officially ending at 7:30pm. Scores and standings will be constantly changing until then, but the action is all being broadcast on Twitch.Tv. Periodic updates can also be found on the Donkey Kong Blog. The individuals who made it to this point must either be among the top 12 ranked players in the world (according to Twin Galaxies as of October 25) or be one of the top 10 finishers from the Friday and Saturday wildcard qualifiers. Ars will continue to monitor the action and update this post if any World Record scores are set.

In addition to Donkey Kong, 15 world record attempts were planned for this year's Kong Off. Successful quarters include: Bobby Wilson setting a record for Puzzle Fighter 2 with a score of 507,860; Sam Miller becoming the best in the world at Ms. Pac-Man Turbo with a score of 947,380; and David Cruz playing a perfect game of Pac-Man to bring up the infamous kill screen.

Update: Ross Benzinger (holder of the second highest Kong score in the

World Record standings) was dead last heading into "last quarter." He finished that final run with the second highest total of the tournament, meaning Jeff Willms held on to win his second consecutive Kong Off:

1. Jeff Willms 1,096,200
2. Ross Benziger 1,067,100
3. Hank Chien 1,056,900
4. Steve Wiltshire 1,053,200
5. Steve Wiebe 1,048,800

Willms earned another pro-wrestling style Kong Off belt and is now two-for-two in Kong Off appearances. Nine competitors finished with scores above one million, and some didn't even need to hit the final kill screen in order to do it.

### Investors Flock to Europe in Search of Next Supercell

Riding a wave of euphoria surrounding the success of Finnish mobile game maker Supercell, venture capital firms are chasing after European tech start-ups in search of the next big thing.

Japanese tech and telecoms group SoftBank's 51 percent stake purchase in 3-year-old Supercell, announced last month, valued the maker of hit games "Clash of Clans" and "Hay Day" at \$3 billion.

"Everybody wants to be the new Supercell," Torleif Ahlsand, General Partner at Nordic technology investor Northzone, said at the annual "Slush" tech start-up conference in the Finnish capital.

With low economic growth prospects in Europe and the United States, venture capital investors hungry for yield are looking to new tech start-ups to provide the high level of returns they seek. And the amount of cash chasing the next potential winner could drive up valuations.

A strong market debut by Twitter Inc. in the United States and a comeback by Facebook following a shaky market debut last year has also lifted the mood.

Finnish gaming veteran Lasse Seppanen, CEO of PlayRaven, said in the past he had had to chase the venture capitalists.

"These days, VCs are calling me," he said.

And while investors say there is a risk of bubbles forming, the industry appeared to be growing at a more sustainable pace than in previous tech booms.

"We think there is going to be a steady flow of billion dollar companies in Europe," Kevin Comolli, General Partner at Accel, an early Supercell investor, told Reuters.

Venture capital investments remain below pre-crisis levels but have been rising steadily. Investments in the tech sector in Europe are at \$3.22 billion so far in 2013, compared with \$3.58 billion last year, according to Thomson Reuters data. Europe makes up 11 percent of global investments so far this year compared with 10 percent in 2012.

The "Slush" conference this year was a sell-out, attracting 5,000 people - many in hoodies and beanies - who crammed into an old cable factory. Supercell's conference after-party, featuring laser lights and shots of Fisu - vodka spiced with menthol lozenges - lasted into the early hours.

"I have never seen these kind of times in the gaming industry," said Petri Jarvilehto, who worked for Angry Birds creator Rovio as chief game developer before co-founding Seriously, which last week secured \$2.4 million in seed funding though it has yet to release a single game.

"The transition is such that it is possible to build up something from scratch and emerge as an global actor in a couple of years. I wanted to give it a shot."

Two of the hottest areas in Europe are gaming and e-commerce. Investors are quick to point to companies like Swedish music streamer Spotify, payments firm Klarna and online retailer Zalando in Germany as some of the stars.

Niklas Zennstrom, founder of Skype - sold to Microsoft in 2011 for \$8.5 billion - said European tech start-ups are maturing nicely.

"They are not just big in terms of user bases, they are also becoming real businesses," Zennstrom, who now runs tech investment firm Atomico, told journalists. "There are a lot of sustainable, robust businesses."

Swedish start-up Tictail, a do-it-yourself e-commerce platform for retailers which this week signed on Project A Ventures as a strategic partner, said there is greater competition to stand out.

"I think investors just want to see a clearer plan for a route to market. User traction has become extremely important," said Carl Waldekranz, Tictail co-founder.

European start-ups are also attracting more interest from U.S. investors, who may be finding companies on their doorstep too pricey.

Snapchat, a two-year-old U.S. mobile messaging firm, rejected an acquisition offer from Facebook which valued the firm at a whopping \$3 billion, the Wall Street Journal reported this week.

Europe could be at a turning point for start-ups and their investors looking for exit opportunities in the form of M&A deals or share sales.

"There's a generation of companies in Europe which are getting ready to exit or to go public," said Ben Holmes at Index Ventures.

But beneath all the froth, there are concerns that valuations may become overheated. The outperformance of the gaming industry in particular, by companies like Supercell and Candy Crush Saga maker King, has taken many by surprise.

"I think definitely it's a bubble," Ahlsand said, about the gaming industry. "Some will emerge as winners, but most definitely will not."

A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

## Shareholders Raise Surveillance Concerns at AT&T, Verizon

Shareholders of telecom giants AT&T Inc and Verizon Communications Inc are seeking more details related to their sharing of customer information with governments, showing investors starting to push back over the role of communications companies in spying operations.

Activists including Trillium Asset Management of Boston and the \$161 billion New York State Common Retirement Fund have filed proposals for the spring shareholder meetings of AT&T and Verizon, representatives said.

Both resolutions call on the companies to report semi-annually on "metrics and discussion regarding requests for customer information by U.S. and foreign governments."

As carriers of massive amounts of voice and data traffic, the telecommunications companies have been at the center of controversies over the use of their data by U.S. intelligence agencies. Just on Monday the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear a challenge to a ruling that gave the government access to Verizon records of millions of telephone calls.

A worry is the close ties could hurt the companies' business, said Trillium Senior Vice President Jonas Kron.

"From an investor perspective, this is one of those issues where there's an overlap of interests" among privacy advocates and business groups, Kron said. He cited surveys that spying fears could cut tens of billions of dollars from the sales of cloud computing services.

AT&T spokesman Mark Siegel said that "As standard practice we look carefully at all shareholder proposals but at this point in the process we do not expect to comment on them."

Verizon spokesman Bob Varettoni declined to comment on the shareholder proposal it received except to say the company is evaluating it.

Customers in growth markets like China have historically mistrusted U.S. technology corporations. Those fears have been stoked by disclosures from former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.

For instance, Cisco Systems Inc last week blamed what some analysts call "the Snowden effect" in part for dismal quarterly revenue. Others have questioned the financial impact of the revelations, however.

In response many technology companies have pushed for - or at least aimed to be seen pushing for - transparency in their dealings with U.S. intelligence agencies.

Companies including Google Inc, Microsoft Corp, Twitter Inc, Facebook Inc, Apple Inc and Yahoo! Inc have published "transparency reports" showing government data requests. Some have in addition gone to court seeking to

disclose more details.

But the two big telecommunications companies have not responded as aggressively to the data requests, the shareholder activists note in their resolutions.

Specifically, the resolutions cite press reports of the intelligence agencies' involvement with the companies, and the resulting criticism from figures like Brazil's president Dilma Rousseff, who called U.S. monitoring activities "a breach of international law."

The resolutions call on AT&T and Verizon to publish semi-annual reports, subject to current laws, "providing metrics and discussion regarding requests for customer information by U.S. and foreign governments, at reasonable cost and omitting proprietary information."

Trillium has \$1.3 billion under management and calls itself the oldest independent investment adviser focused on sustainable and responsible investing. Trillium and other activists have used shareholder proposals in the past to air out arcane issues such as several "network neutrality" measures it brought at AT&T and Verizon since 2012. One at Verizon in the spring won support from 24 percent of shareholders.

Even when such measures don't pass, activists see them as a way to call attention to issues.

"Often the utility of such resolutions is to generate conversation with and among management, particularly if the company has refused to engage in other ways," said Christine Bader, a lecturer on human rights and business at Columbia University. She is also affiliated with the Global Network Initiative, a privacy-advocacy group that counts some of the technology companies as participants.

Filers of the AT&T proposal include the New York State fund, Trillium, the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, and Arjuna Capital, according to a statement from Open MIC, a non-profit organization in New York that works with investors on media issues and helped organize the resolutions.

Filers of the Verizon proposal include Trillium, the ACLU chapter, the Park Foundation, and Clean Yield Asset Management, the activists said.

Adding Just Kidding To Your Nasty Internet Comment Doesn't Work, Jerk

The days of lashing out at someone with homophobic or racist remarks online then adding "just kidding" and pretending everything is fine are over. According to a new poll conducted by the Associated Press and MTV, a most young people say the jokey disclaimer doesn't make insults less offensive.

Of the 1,300 kids surveyed, they said that seeing offensive slurs online is becoming the norm, but don't interpret the insults personally. Compared to the same poll conducted two years ago, millennials are "more disapproving" of slurs hurled at them and more than half said that it's wrong to use offensive remarks around friends even if they don't mean it.

However, that doesn't mean the amount of mean comments is decreasing. In

fact, they held steady since last year with a bulk of the mean comments are posted to YouTube, Facebook, and shocker, gaming communities like Xbox Live. In terms of the firing line, kids say they frequently see crude postings pointed at overweight people, gays, blacks and women.

So, why are kids intolerable assholes? The AP explains:

To be funny, according to most young people who see it. Another big reason: to be cool. Less than a third said a major reason people use slurs is because they actually harbor hateful feelings toward the groups they are maligning.

Some things never change.

#### Microsoft Kills Ballmer's Morale-wrecking Employee Ranking System

Here's how you know the Steve Ballmer era is truly ending at Microsoft: The company has finally killed off stack ranking. ZDNet reports that Microsoft will no longer evaluate its employees' performances on a curve because it wants to foster more cooperation between different workers and departments within the company. Microsoft's stack ranking system, which has come under withering criticism from former employees, essentially mandated that all managers create tiers that ranked the best and worst workers within their departments. The top workers in each department were put on the fast track for advancement while the bottom performers saw their careers stumble into dead ends.

The problem with stack ranking was that it created a culture where talented employees were afraid to work with one another for fear of hurting their careers simply because they were the worst-performing people among a group of top performers. To get a sense of what this is like, consider what would happen if the player who batted ninth in the American League's All-Star lineup every year didn't just bat last but was also forced to return to the minor leagues after the game. In other words, it wouldn't be too surprising to see the light-hitting shortstops and catchers take their baseball bats to the knees of the slugging first basemen and left fielders just so they could move up in the order a bit.

This is essentially what happened at Microsoft, according to multiple accounts. Former Microsoft manager David Auerbach wrote this past summer that stack ranking was a zero-sum game where one person could succeed only if their fellow employees failed.

This sort of organizational dissembling skews your psyche, he wrote. After I left Microsoft, I was left with lingering paranoia for months, always wondering about the agendas of those around me, skeptical that what I was being told was the real story. I didn't realize until the nonstacked performance review time at my new job that I'd become so wary. At the time inside Microsoft it just seemed the only logical way to be.

Microsoft employees are likely rejoiced on Tuesday when they learned that this particular brand of fear and loathing had come to an end.

Software Patent Reform Just Died in the House, Thanks to IBM and Microsoft

On Wednesday, the House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to consider legislation aimed at reining in abusive patent litigation. But one of the bill's most important provisions, designed to make it easier to nix low-quality software patents, will be left on the cutting room floor. That provision was the victim of an aggressive lobbying campaign by patent-rich software companies such as IBM and Microsoft.

The legislation is sponsored by Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. He unveiled a new version of his bill last month, touting it as a cure for the problem of patent trolls. One provision would have expanded what's known as the "covered business method" (CBM) program, which provides an expedited process for the Patent Office to get rid of low-quality software patents. That change would aid in the fight against patent trolls because low-quality software patents are trolls' weapon of choice.

But the change could affect the bottom lines of companies with large software patent portfolios. And few firms have larger software patent portfolios than Microsoft and IBM. These companies, which also happen to have two of the software industry's largest lobbying budgets, have been leading voices against the expansion of the CBM program.

The CBM program provides a quick and cost-effective way for a defendant to challenge the validity of a plaintiff's patent. Under the program, litigation over the patent is put on hold while the Patent Office considers a patent's validity. That's important because the high cost of patent litigation is a big source of leverage for patent trolls.

The original CBM program, which was created by the 2011 America Invents Act, was limited to a relatively narrow class of financial patents. The Goodlatte bill would have codified a recent decision opening the program up to more types of patents. And advocates hoped that change would be a steppingstone to eventually subjecting all software patents to greater scrutiny.

But large software companies had other ideas. A September letter signed by IBM, Microsoft and several dozen other firms made the case against expanding the program. The proposal, they wrote, "could harm U.S. innovators by unnecessarily undermining the rights of patent holders. Subjecting data processing patents to the CBM program would create uncertainty and risk that discourage investment in any number of fields where we should be trying to spur continued innovation."

Of course, advocates of the program disagree. They point out that software patents are disproportionately responsible for the recent rise of patent litigation. The fact that technology startups almost inevitably face patent threats is itself a significant disincentive for innovation. So it's far from clear that subjecting software patents to greater scrutiny would be bad for innovation.

Last week, IBM escalated its campaign against expanding the CBM program. An IBM spokesman told Politico, "While we support what Mr. Goodlatte is trying to do on trolls, if the CBM is included, we'd be forced to oppose the bill."

Sources close to the negotiations say the campaign against the CBM provisions of the Goodlatte bill has succeeded. The House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to hold a markup of the legislation Wednesday, and Goodlatte will introduce a "manager's amendment" to remove the CBM



language from his own bill. IBM hailed that change in a Monday letter to Goodlatte.

The revised legislation would still take significant steps to curb abusive litigation tactics favored by trolls. But troll tactics are merely a symptom of the patent system's dysfunction. The more fundamental issue is the large number of low-quality patents, and the Goodlatte bill no longer has a provision to deal with that problem.

But the fight against bad software patents isn't over. After Goodlatte's about-face, the House of Representatives is unlikely to pass legislation expanding the CBM program. But CBM expansion has a powerful supporter in the Senate. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), who was the driving force behind the original CBM program in 2011, remains determined to expand the CBM program in the Senate's patent reform legislation. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has signaled his willingness to work with Schumer on the proposal.

"Creating a low-cost alternative to litigation in order to address the poor-quality patents that are currently plaguing startups and small businesses is a cornerstone of effective reform," Schumer said in a statement Tuesday night. "I am continuing to have productive conversations with my colleagues and stakeholders in the Senate, and fully expect the critical issue of patent quality to be addressed in the Senate legislation."

Schumer will have powerful allies. The White House endorsed CBM expansion in June. A broad coalition of brick-and-mortar industries, including casinos, supermarkets, chain restaurants, airlines, the printing industry, real estate agents, hotels and retailers, endorsed the concept in a letter last month.

Still, companies with large software patent portfolios have a lot to lose if their patents are subjected to serious scrutiny. So, Schumer won't get his way without a fight.

### 'Super Wi-Fi' Heading for U.S. Campuses

So-called "Super Wi-Fi," a new kind of wireless broadband, got a boost Thursday with the announcement that the technology would become available to hundreds of US colleges and universities.

Declaration Networks, a company working with colleges and non-profit groups, said it is now starting to offer the service to 500 schools around the United States.

The technology is often referred to as "Super Wi-Fi," although some wireless providers point out it uses a different frequency for transmission than what most people use in cafes and in home networks.

The service uses "white spaces" or unused portions of the spectrum that is generally available for local television broadcasts.

This wireless technology offers a bigger range than existing hotspots, is being deployed in the United States and generating interest in a number of countries, including Britain and Brazil.

Declaration has been working with a consortium of higher education institutions and nonprofits called AIR.U, whose members are interested in improving high-speed wireless access, particularly in rural and other underserved areas.

"We are excited to be accelerating the implementation of next generation networks in educational communities by creating this nationwide sustainable program that will deploy high capacity broadband networks leveraging White Spaces," stated Bob Nichols, chief executive of Declaration Networks Group.

Declaration spokesman Barry Toser said West Virginia University is the first to deploy the service but added that "we are engaging with the other schools."

He said Super Wi-Fi requires no additional equipment for most devices and can have a range of up to five miles (eight kilometers) compared with 350 feet (100 meters) for traditional Wi-Fi.

Toser said colleges will be able to contract with Declaration for access for their campuses, and that residents in nearby communities may also sign up.

The AIR.U initiative, announced in 2012, seeks to establish white space networks in underserved campuses and their surrounding communities. It is supported by Google, Microsoft, New America Foundation and the Appalachian Regional Commission, among others.

The new deployment "responds to the need at many colleges to quickly and easily close gaps in campus broadband connectivity," said Michael Calabrese, director of the Wireless Future Project at the New America Foundation and an AIR.U co-founder.

"Since Super Wi-Fi technology is new, we believe that these initial deployments will quickly give colleges and communities the experience and confidence to plan more extensive deployments in the future."

#### Dot London: City Launches Own Domain To Boost Online Presence

London will join a handful of cities launching their own internet domain names next year to build a greater online presence and promote the British capital, the mayor's office said on Friday.

ICANN, the world body that oversees the web's naming conventions, gave London the go-ahead this week to use its own unique domain name from 2014, along with New York, Berlin, Vienna and Brussels.

The city's mayor, Boris Johnson, said adopting the ".london" suffix would enable organizations to associate themselves more closely with London's global brand.

"This is also an excellent opportunity to expand London's digital presence, which in turn is set to generate funds to invest back into the city," he said in a statement.

ICANN's Vice President for Europe, Nigel Hickson, said that, in addition to country-specific domains such as ".uk", there are currently only 22

generic top-level domains, including the familiar ".com".

He said ICANN had received requests for broad domains such as ".music" or ".tree", as well as from companies seeking to use their names as a domain.

Hickson told Reuters he expected the number of domains to skyrocket, with as many as 1,000 new generic domains to be approved in the next year.

Hickson noted that it is not cheap to run an entity to register and sell domain names, but hoped the impact of expanding domain names would improve competition on the web.

#### Dot UK: British Firms Can Trim Web Addresses

Businesses using the ".co.uk" web address domain will be able to shorten the suffix to simply ".uk" next year to help make website names snappier, British Internet registry organization Nominet said on Wednesday.

The new domain brings Britain in line with Germany's .de and France's .fr. It will be available from summer 2014 to all new websites, for the same price as an existing .co.uk domain.

For those already holding .co.uk, .org.uk, and other similar addresses, Nominet will offer an equivalent .uk domain, which will be held in reserve for five years.

After that period, firms who do not choose to buy the new address will see that .uk domain opened up to all-comers.

"There's a lot of support for a shorter and snappier domain," said Lesley Cowley, chief executive of Nominet, a not-for-profit company.

"It's about helping people to have more memorable names and keeping the trust and confidence that they already have in .uk."

Last week ICANN, the governing body responsible for the internet's directory, introduced the domain .london for businesses seeking to associate themselves with the city.

#### New Ultrabook Boasts 22-hour Battery Life

Launched on Wednesday in Japan, Toshiba's latest ultrabook, the Dynabook Kira V634, sets a new battery-life benchmark.

Take that Apple. When the company announced that, thanks to a Haswell processor update, its latest superlight notebook, the MacBook Air, could now go 13 hours on a single battery charge, there were gasps of amazement.

However, Toshiba was clearly less than impressed, as its latest ultrabook proves. The 13.3-inch display Dynabook Kira V634 weighs just 1.12kg, supports 4K video output, comes with 8GB of RAM as standard and a solid state 128GB hard disk; but, most importantly, thanks to a Haswell (Intel's fourth generation dual core processor) chip, it can go a

scarcely believable 22 hours on a single battery charge and all for just 144,000 Yen (about \$1446).

It also has a higher specification counterpart with a better, 2,560 x 1,440 pixel touchscreen display which will retail for 153,000 yen (\$1,530) and offers a slightly less impressive 14 hours of battery life between charges. As such it is one of the first devices to meet Intel's updated definition of the term 'ultrabook'.

For a portable computer to be able to call itself an ultrabook from 2014 it will have to have an Intel Haswell Processor, a touchscreen display and run Windows 8.1 - these criteria are why Apple's superlight laptop, the MacBook Air cannot be referred to as an ultrabook.

Toshiba is yet to confirm if or when the computers will be coming to Europe or the US.

#### School Faces Unmitigated Disaster After Buying Students HP Tablets

One school in Ireland is seriously regretting its decision to buy tablets from HP. Ireland's Independent reports that Mountrath Community College has admitted that its decision to replace traditional books with HP ElitePad tablets has been an unmitigated disaster after the majority of tablets the school bought experienced a variety of problems including failing to switch on, tablets spontaneously going into sleep mode, devices looping while performing automatic repairs, system board failures and issues with Wi-Fi. The school has had to reorder paper books to give its students, who were simply unable to learn as long as they had to depend on malfunctioning HP tablets. HP has said that it's made providing working tablets for the school a major priority.

#### MakerBot Says Shoppers Ready for 3D Printers, Some Have Doubts

MakerBot, a 3D printer maker which opened two new retail stores this week, is among the companies trying to bring the cutting-edge digital manufacturing technology to Main Street consumers, but skeptics say the rollout is premature.

MakerBot, a unit of Stratsys Ltd, opened retail stores this week in Boston and in Greenwich, Connecticut, both of which are twice the size of MakerBot's first store, 1,500 square feet in downtown Manhattan.

The company offers designs for more than 100,000 items through its "Thingiverse" online user community. The products range from knick-knacks like zombie sculptures to jewelry, sink drains and even medical devices. They are printed using its line of corn-based plastic fibers in more than a dozen colors.

"For most people 3D printing is futuristic science fiction. We're here to make it real," said CEO Bre Pettis, who cut the ribbon at the store on Boston's fashionable Newbury Street using scissors made on one of Marketbot's Replicator printers which start at \$2,199.

Pettis, who has purchased splashy magazine ads to promote 3D printers as

holiday gifts, believes there could soon be a 3D printer on every block in America.

Yet some technology experts say 3D printers may not be ready for prime time because they are still much less user friendly than most modern consumer electronics.

"There is so much hype," said Pete Basiliere, an analyst at technology research firm Gartner. "People are getting a little bit misled as to how easy it is," he said.

Some investors also are skeptical of 3D printing's readiness for the market. Short-seller Citron this week published an article questioning the earnings of Germany's Voxeljet AG's , and shares in the sector fell, including those of MakerBot parent Stratsys and rivals 3D Systems Corp. and ExOne Co.

Yet stock prices don't concern Leon McCarthy, a 12-year-old from Marblehead, Massachusetts, who was born without fingers and could only afford a prosthetic hand after his dad learned that they could be made using 3D printers.

His dad, Paul, helped arrange for him to get his first printed prosthesis nine months ago, a clunky device tied together with screws, bolts and cardboard dubbed "Frankenhand."

Three iterations later, the functionality is much better, though still limited compared to devices that cost thousands of dollars. But when he broke it playing football last week, he made a new one for less than \$5 on a printer at school.

Since its inception, the concept of 3D printing has drawn strong opinions. Critics say the technology could be put to nefarious purposes, like building plastic guns and other weapons resistant to detection.

But in a major vote of confidence, President Barack Obama in February singled out the industry as having the potential to create jobs and "revolutionize" almost everything we make.

Gartner says the consumer market is growing briskly, yet the numbers are still tiny compared to traditional printers. It forecasts sales will climb to some 72,000 printers next year, up from about 42,000 in 2013 and about 28,000 in 2012.

Buyers need to know that there is a learning curve, according to experts: Users must use software for computer-aided design, or CAD, or at least learn to work with templates from websites such as Thingiverse and Defense Distributed, which published the first 3D-printable gun blueprint, the Liberator.

They must also calibrate temperatures for melting plastic used to build objects, said Joe Stewart, a security researcher with Dell SecureWorks who runs a hacking space in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, that owns three 3D printers.

"They are very finicky. You have to do a lot of tweaking of hardware and software." he said "I'm not sure the average consumer is ready for that."

MakerBot, founded in 2009 is one of the oldest makers of desktop 3D printers, but it has plenty of competition.

The 114-page Ultimate Guide to 3D Printing, published this month by MAKE Magazine, lists more than 20 3D printers ranging in price from \$399 to more than \$3,000.

MakerBot's Replicator was rated best option for so-called prosumers. The UP Plus 2 from Delta Micro Factory Corp, which cost \$1,649, won the "Just Hit Print" category for ease of use. The Printrbot Simple, a \$399 build-it-yourself kit from Lincoln, California-based Printrbot Inc. got the award for "best value."

## 5 Shortcuts for Quicker Internet Browsing

Productivity experts say that keyboard shortcuts are 60% faster than using a mouse. So here are my top five shortcuts that work in all the major browsers: Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome and Firefox.

(Note: while these tricks work in all browsers, on a Mac, you may need to use the Command key instead of Control.)

Shortcut # 1: Move Quickly Between Tabs    Control-Tab

If you need to move between multiple web pages, working in multiple tabs is faster than multiple windows. Why? Because Control-Tab lets you fly through all your tabs.

Shortcut #2: Reopening a Tab You Just Closed    Control-Shift-T

Sometimes you're moving so fast online that you accidentally close a tab. That can be frustrating, particularly if the page you just closed had some crazy, hard-to-remember URL. Fear not. Control-Shift-T reopens the last closed tab.

Shortcut # 3: Zooming In    Control-+

Want to see some detail on a webpage more clearly? Font too small? No problem. To zoom in, hit Control and the plus key (if your keyboard has the + sign on the same key as the = sign, you do not need to hit Shift as well). To zoom out, use Control and the minus key.

Shortcut # 4: Better than Scrolling    Spacebar

Sometimes you get to a really long web page, and you want to scroll, but mousing or using the scroll bar on the right side of the browser frame can be tedious. Instead, try the Spacebar. Every time you hit it, the web page will scroll down one frame. To move one frame up on the page, use Shift and Spacebar

Shortcut #5: Fast Find    Control-F

If you don't want to wade through the whole page to find what you're looking for, use the Control-F shortcut. It opens a little search bar at the top of the browser window. Type in the keyword you're looking for, and it will list how many times it appears on the page. Then click on the arrow to the right of that new search box, and the page will advance to the next point at which that keyword appears.

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